

General Keefe: Lady's and gentlemen thank you for joining us today at Camp Bondsteel. Today marks my ninth and final Press conference as the Commanding General of Multi Brigade east. In five days time another contingent of American soldiers will assume responsibility for this sector. The soldiers replacing us are from America's 28th Infantry Division. Today I have with me the Commander Brigadier General Jerry Beck, the incoming Commander of Multi National Brigade East. These soldiers are well trained and ready to perform the mission. You will find them to be extremely professional and committed. General Beck brings a wealth of experience having served as the Deputy Commander of the American contingent in Bosnia. As I prepare to depart Kosovo two thoughts come to mind. First I will never forget the friendliness and optimism of the Kosovo people. I want to thank all of you for your support to the soldiers of Multi National Brigade East over the last year. A successful future in Kosovo, in my opinion, lies along the path of continued support by the people of the region and close cooperation with KFOR, UNMIK, and the international community. Secondly our mission here, based on UN Security Resolution 1244, is to provide a safe and secure environment that allows democratic civilian institutions to take hold. And although we've seen tremendous progress, looking back over the last four years, we also see a small number of extremist and criminals who want to take Kosovo back to the past. My experience over the last year tells me that the vast majority of Kosovo people reject these extremists. These extremist acts as inflamed by the attack on UN buildings in Pristina last week are activities that threaten your safety and security and they undermine our progress. These violent groups think they can achieve their goals by the use of brutality and intimidation rather than following the rule of law. Reject their violence, reject their hatred, and continue to work in close cooperation with KFOR and the international community. The new soldiers in this sector will carry on like all KFOR soldiers before them with continued commitment to the people here in Kosovo. This transfer of authority, from one unit to the next, exemplifies NATO and America's commitment to the peace in this region. That commitment is most clearly seen in the faces of our soldiers who serve so the people of Kosovo have an opportunity for a bright future. Thank you.

General Beck: Ladies and gentlemen I'm happy to be here today, with Brigadier General Keefe, as we continue the process of transition of the First Infantry Division to the 28th Infantry Division. Four years ago KFOR entered Kosovo to establish a safe and secure environment. The first Infantry Division has played a major role in the establishment of security and the progress that you see in Kosovo today. They have led a successful mission over the last nine months that has encouraged displaced individuals to return, the KPS to accept the more responsibility for the security of Kosovo, and for the people of Kosovo to look towards the future with hope and dedication to a productive future. My soldiers are trained, ready, and enthusiastic to begin this critical mission America has given us. We understand the importance of the journey upon which we are about to embark. America's commitment in the form of the men and women you will see patrolling villages and towns in this sector remain strong and steadfast. We are here to provide an opportunity for the people of Kosovo to continue along the path of progress. We look forward to working along side the Multi National soldiers of this Brigade, our

partners in international community, and the people of this sector in this endeavor. Thank you.

General Keefe: I'll now be glad to take your questions. Sir...

First Media: I'm glad that you've been here almost a year and you've created a secure environment. But you're leaving Kosovo at the same time when Kosovo has no SRSG for funding. Regardless of that the steps that you took towards security were great. I would like to hear a comment from you for the present security of Kosovo.

General Keefe: Thank you for your kind words. But the thanks doesn't go to me, the thanks goes to those thousands of soldiers, America's and all the nations sons and daughters, that's who really deserves the thanks. My first time in Kosovo was in late 2000, almost two and a half years ago. And you all know as well as I do when you take that long view the security situation in Kosovo today is much better and doesn't even compare to two or three years ago. So like the people of Kosovo I too am optimistic towards the future. But we know, and you all know that there are people out there that don't share a view to the future and that want to take Kosovo to the past. And as I've said in my opening statement, reject them. But I'm optimistic. Thank you.

2nd Media: *There's a lot of rumors that in Frazai will be the first IDPs who will return. At this time in Frazai there is about 20 Serbs who live there. They're guarded regularly by KFOR soldiers. Will there be same security measurements for the new Serbs who return?*

General Keefe: There have been, just in this year, 2003, documented almost three hundred and fifty people who have returned to their homes throughout the region. And the security situation is such that we have not increased security for those returns. The Kosovo police service of which there are a thousand of them in this region, fifteen percent are Serbian, have provided adequate security for those returns. And with respect to us providing direct security that has reduced dramatically over the last three years as the security situation has improved and this society has normalized. I expect that to continue. With respect to Fraizai Yoroskovic specifically I'm very encouraged by the Kosovo leadership, the local mayor, and the positive welcome for people to return to their homes, and we're beginning to see that and so I'm very positive for the future of those returns. Thank you.

3rd Media: *General, you've mentioned the visit of Chief of Whuse Office in Pristina, Mr. Hernia Something, and President Goven in Fraizai and their talks with minorities and their encouragement to minorities to get back to their homes. And you see it as a very positive event, now what are your indicators on returns? How much will these kinds of types of leaders speed up the process of returns? Do you have any indications from the ground?*

General Keefe: Well first as I think I mentioned earlier you see the people coming back, three hundred and fifty returns this year, a thousand last year, so we see people make

decisions on their own to return. We see people return to Markets, for example the Gjilan Market, where Serbs regularly attend that. And so we see positive signs of freedom of movement. And finally I would say, just my experience of being here the last year, and I'm not talking about all communities, I do sense a feeling among the people of returned to normalcy within Kosovo and it takes time but I do feel that we're on the right, that we're on the right course. And so I think they are positive signs out there.

4th Media: *My question is how do you see the future of Kosovo? Because you have lots of information, and you've been here for a long time, and you're about to leave.*

General Keefe: Well as I've already mentioned there has certainly have been progress; you can see it over the long term. But it takes cooperation with the people, UNMIK, and the entire national community because there are extremist out there that don't share this same view for the future. Though I said we got to reject those. This democratic, these democratic institutions are taking hold. And as they get stronger all these institutions, police, courts, government, this society will continue to return, will continue to normalize. So to answer your question directly I'm cautiously optimistic. Thank you.

5th Media: *Bear in mind that you were General of this sector and in incoming days we will see a release of reports guarding criminic incident. Do you believe that, that report is accurate and do you believe that that report is all encompassing?*

Translator: Which report?

5th Media: *Criminic report of the shelling inside Kosovo's territory the year 2001. Is due to be released.*

General Keefe: I'm not familiar with the report so I really can't even comment on that. Next question.

6th Media: *Last Thursday an opening American has opening in Stripsa has a considerable amount of Serb and Albanian market gores. However on the same occasion an opening session of the local city government was about to take place, there was a noticeable boycott of both Albanian and Serb members. Is this an indication, will this be an indication to you that the politicians are yet again separating from the population and if the political structure of the Stripsha community are off to par with their job interested?*

General Keefe: With respect to the market what a positive sign, another positive sign of this multi society growing, and Struphi's a great example. My experience with the leaders throughout the Gjilan region, now in nine months, that were elected almost a year ago now, or last October, has been generally positive over all. I think the majority of them had the interest of the people in part. With respect to the specific incident you're talking about it's really more appropriate for the UNMIK regional representative to address, I'm just not familiar with the specific case you're talking about. But I take away that market

and as you all think about that in Sterpshi another multi ethnic market. Like Gjilan, what a positive sign for this entire region. Next question please.

7th Media: *My question for General Beck, you said that your soldiers are prepared for the critical mission that your country has given to you, why do you call it a critical mission? Do you think that Kosovo is an unsafe place for your mission and are you going to change something in the mission in Kosovo?*

General Beck: Our troops have been working over training for the last four months for peace support operations. And we'll continue to support the great activities that have occurred in Kosovo with the close cooperation of the international authorities, with the good people of Kosovo that are committed to getting Kosovo moving on in its mission throughout this nation, this province. So I will say that we will continue forward with the progress that's been started here with the work that the 1st Infantry Division has done over the last nine months.

General Keefe: Thank you.

8th Media: *This is a question for General Keefe, what do you speak about last acts of violence? Do you believe that there's a great risk of bad situation and do you believe that KFOR can stop if anything bad would happen? And does it look interesting to you and how do you access the statement of General Meany when he speaks about Balkan Army here?*

General Keefe: I won't speak for General Meany; you should direct your questions to him. But make no mistake that KFOR has adequate capability here to deal with any situation. We continue to access our capability and I am confident that the, that our force can, is capable of doing this mission. Thank you.

9th Media: *My question is for General Keefe, regarding that one of the biggest issue in your sector is the issue of the border what is your assessment and what risk can bring for this region, the unsolved question of the border between Macedonia and Kosovo?*

General Keefe: Well with respect to the border issue it really is a question for UNMIK as it is a political question. But I feel that they are doing good faith efforts, especially in terms of crossing points. And I look for continued progress. But it's not for me as a soldier here to comment on political issues.

10th Media: *Just to follow up this question, okay this is a political question but when you will put your soldiers in an old borderline with Macedonia in a new one? And what about contradictory statements about border with Serbia, especially the Muchibaba village?*

General Keefe: What specific, what are you referring to? What contradictory statements are you referring to?

10 Media: *Religious claim that borderline was changed by Serbian force.*

General Keefe: There is no validity to that claim. There is no change there. We have close observation of both the boundary line and the border with soldiers, with aircraft, and other resources. And I'm confident that there has not been no evidence of any violations, and the statement that someone says that the border has changed has no validity.

10th Media: *Sorry, What about the parts with the border of Macedonia? I didn't get an answer.*

General Keefe: I'm gonna ask you the question.

10th Media: *Yeah, I'll repeat that, when you will put your soldiers in the old borderline in Macedonia, in the new one, in the middle?*

General Keefe: There's one border that was agreed by UN years ago and we adhere to that border. Okay last question, my last question.

11th Media: *Since we're discussing here the neighbors of your sector former commander of USBMB will still be captain in Camp Bondsteel, I just want to know how far the instigation has gone in this direction?*

General Keefe: I'm not sure who he's referring to, and what's the question?

11th Media: *How far are the investigations due on this case with Captain Something?*

General Keefe: UNMIK P and UNIMIK Justice have responsibility for that investigation, and that would be the one to ask that question to, we're not investigating. Let me just say in closing, to all of you here and the people of Kosovo, thank you very much for your support, to the soldiers, not only American soldiers, but the Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Greek soldiers under my command. We'll never forget our experiences here in Kosovo and we've done our very best. General Beck and the soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division, from what I have seen, are equally committed and are well trained. And together we will move forward and there's a bright future out there for Kosovo. Thank you very much.

Note: Any underlined word are words I wasn't sure of, usually cities and names.

Transcribed By: PFC Anaidy Claudio/203rd MPAD

